

Talking Intuition Into Consciousness: A Discursive Approach to Evolving an Understanding

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ABSTRACT

This paper utilises discursive puzzling to examine the interplay of intuition, student-teacher interactions and feedback for practitioner research in language teaching. The authors, both educators and researchers, utilise dialogue to unravel the subtleties of these components in the teaching-learning dynamic, which we discuss as a process of co-creation. We initially scrutinize the role of intuition, revealing its significance in quick decision-making and its alignment with expert thinking. Through the discussion, we came to recognise the crucial dimension of feedback, which we recognise comes from a variety of sources, and we discuss how it shapes educators' intuitive processes. We also discuss the convergence of teaching and research, examining the blurred boundaries between them, which we found to be especially true for exploratory practice. Through this discursive analysis, we found that practitioner research enriches teaching by fostering continuous learning, transforming it into a sustainable form of professional development, where educators and learners mutually contribute. In this way, teaching and researching also lead to learning and development, thus becoming its own reward. This analysis underscores the multifaceted nature of intuition in language teaching and research.

Keywords: dialogic puzzling, intuition, motivation, practitioner research

INTRODUCTION: TUITION AND INTUITION

Intuition plays an important role in teaching; from an individual lesson to a whole course, and even spanning a teacher's entire career. A single lesson may involve a string of hundreds of decisions by the teacher, with the majority being made at a level that “[straddles] the known and the unknown in a subtle dance of the self” (Wenger, 1998, p. 41). As teachers, we are often expected to know about the different ways our students learn, to work with groups and individuals in the same breath, and to know the ins-and-outs of the type of content that we should be teaching. These are “the fluid, dynamic tensions of working for understanding” (Hanks, 2017, p. 108). Teachers rely on intuition to gauge our students’ emotional landscape, to follow their progress, to assess their understanding, and to make snap decisions about when to correct and when to praise. All of these things rely on the development of intuition, which comes from a bedrock of experience that we build upon over time and test out regularly through a braid of trial-and-error, combined with empirical observations. Intuitions are based on accumulated data that teachers collect over time and through experimentation, and our understandings that evolve around results, feedback and, perhaps especially, practitioner research. In this way, specifically engaging in research can potentially help to hone intuition for practitioners, by focusing on specific observations and checking them against actual classroom data.

Although distant, there is an etymological link between the words Tuition and Intuition, as both derive from the verb in Latin *tueri*, meaning to look at or watch over. There was originally a defensive overtone to this word, as it could also mean to guard something. Intuition was a closer, more introspective way of looking, which in the 15th century took on a more spiritual connotation, becoming related to insight. Today, there still clings to the word ‘intuition’ a connotation of a sixth sense or some kind of divine knowing (Chudnoff, 2013), which of course is often used by people with no true understanding of the term to dismiss the word and warn against it. However, as we have discussed in this special issue repeatedly, intuitions are not based on guesswork and, whilst it would be a mistake to say there is nothing mystical about them, they are much more tangible and reliable than they are often given credit for. Intuitions can be wrong, of course, but mainly they help people to make quick and important decisions about a familiar situation (Epstein, 2010; Gilpin & Clibbon, 2000).

In this paper, we discuss the importance of intuition for practitioner research, specifically, exploratory practice (henceforth EP) (Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Hanks, 2017), with a particular focus on understanding through discursive puzzling. We have found that the endeavours of ‘teaching’ and ‘researching’ were often inseparable to us, and that both were heavily informed by an array of intuitive decisions that are then tested or confirmed using different types of evidence. We look at the importance of noticing, and the way that many of the decisions made during the teaching and researching processes are internalised or done tacitly. We talk about how teaching is a co-creative process (see Hanks, 2021), much like a live music performance, and the importance of creating a kind of synergy between learners and teachers. This co-creation of teaching and researching that happens between learners and teachers is particularly influenced by feedback, which we identify to be one of the most important forms of evidence for building up a tacit knowledge about how to respond to certain situations that may arise in the classroom. Finally, we briefly discuss the nature of intuition in research, and how research can be seen as its own reward as it transforms teaching back into learning.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this paper mainly took the form of recorded dialogues which were conducted remotely using video-conferencing software. We had two meetings via Zoom, the first on 22 March 2023, the second on 28 June 2023. The dialogues were recorded and then transcribed, which allowed us to identify the main themes and links in the narrative to aspects that we wanted to further explore. In addition to the spoken discussions, we also communicated via emails, and notes on the draft as it emerged. On 4th August 2023 a final meeting in-person was held on campus at the University of Leeds in the UK where Judith works, just before the first draft was completed. Throughout the composition of the paper, we also exchanged ideas in the form of comments directly on the draft, meaning we had both face-to-face discussions in real-time and asynchronous written discussions too, which allowed for a diversity of discourse types.

In some ways the construction of this chapter resembled a duoethnography (Lowe & Lawrence, 2020; Norris et al., 2012) and in some respects the method was the same as that

used in Pinner and Ushioda (2019) or Wyatt et al. (2016). In both of these papers the narrative data for was collected discursively and emerged naturally as themes were revealed and unpacked through the discussion. However, although the data collection method and analysis stages are similar, the main difference is that the discourse in this present study was not so much focused on the author's own specific experiences or exploring our own relationship to one another. Rather, the focus of the present study is more on a holistic understanding of the role intuition plays in our personal practice specifically, but also for teachers and students more generally as well. As such, the focus is less autoethnographic (see Sampson, this issue for an example of an autoethnography), but what would perhaps best be described as a discursive reflection on practice.

Mann (2002) writes about 'talking ourselves into understanding,' which he argues is best achieved discursively, and has the advantage of getting a more objective, less self-focused understanding of personal philosophies and values. In talking things through with others, we gain a better understanding of it ourselves through verbalising, explaining, and discussing. Arguing for a more data-driven approach to reflective practice, Walsh and Mann (2015) state that reflections which have not been through discussions with colleagues and peers run the risk of being:

- insufficiently data-led,
- heavily focused on the individual at the expense of collaborative options,
- dominated by written forms of reflection,
- lacking in detail about the nature and purposes of reflective tools.

This warning reminded us of the criticisms often levelled at intuition as a construct which is open to mistakes and prone to a feeling of rightness, even when we might, in fact, be wrong (Gilpin & Clibbon, 2000).

As Pinner has previously noted, "[i]ntuition itself is constructed upon subtle yet observable indicators that arise from contextual social interactions. However, the danger of intuition is in not knowing its limitations, or in using it to allow the fossilisation of untested assumptions" (2019, p. 46). In order to further explore the role of intuition, we

decided to team up together and to pool our knowledge and reflections on our practice, but mainly we wanted to talk about intuition to gain a deeper understanding of it together through arriving at a discursive consciousness. Both of us had many questions relating to the role of intuition, and as such they can perhaps be framed as puzzles from EP (Consoli, 2021; Hanks, 2017, 2019). As Hanks (2017, p. 112) puts it: "puzzlement is a way of developing profound understandings – of our practice, of our world, of each other – not superficial solutions. It rejects the politically motivated 'discourse of improvement' [...] and focuses instead on thoughtful interrogation of practice."

During our meetings and discussions, we co-constructed our puzzles, yet at the same time as puzzling we were also working them out together as well, so in many ways the puzzling process was part of the analysis as well. This discursive puzzling had many advantages for both of us, as we will discuss throughout this paper, with Judith actually noting in an email after the first meeting that she had found herself more motivated and inspired by the discussion.

EP is a form of inclusive practitioner research that was developed around a set of seven principles, themselves proposed by teachers working together to create a meaningful form of collaborative research (Allwright, 2003). These principles were later developed and refined, initially focused on learners (Allwright & Hanks, 2009), and then subsequently again with a focus on teachers and educational practitioners as researchers, reframing them once again to become an 'interconnected whole' (Hanks, 2017, p. 227) – see Figure 1.

Hanks (2022) has advocated EP as a framework of principles rather than a set of steps or a methodology to follow. So, for example working collaboratively for understanding (as we are doing here) speaks to principles of 'work for understanding' and 'work co-operatively for mutual development' (see Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 260). We decided to utilise aspects of EP in order to structure our discussions and to ensure that our aims would maximise the overlap between research and practice.

Figure 1. *The Exploratory Practice Principles as an Interconnected Whole* (Hanks, 2017 p. 227)

In order to compose this paper, we decided to arrange the discussion around the main themes that arose from our discursive puzzlings and the ensuing analysis. This analysis was the product of listening back to the recording and making a transcript of the most salient pieces, which then went into the draft and was sent back and forth to generate further ideas or elucidation. As this took place, other ideas became more salient, and the draft took on a new shape. In this way, the actual writing and re-drafting of the paper became an analytical tool and a physical manifestation of the discursive analysis. Because, in this way, data and findings are impossible to delineate, we present the entire paper as a discussion using quotes and data from the various sources of the discussion. At times in the narrative, we need to differentiate which of us was reflecting on their particular story or experiences, and as such we use the first names of the authors in the third person: Richard and Judith. In the actual transcripts from the discussion, we use our first initials. Transcription conventions were kept to a very low granularity, with only longer pauses being indicated by [...].

The rest is kept close to ordinary prose conventions and at times edited for comprehensibility.

In the email just before our first face-to-face discussion on 22 March 2023, Richard sent the following list of preliminary questions, framed as “things I am going to be thinking about” – this was done so as not to impose puzzles on one another.

- *When have I needed to change course in a research project in order to adapt to situations as they arise?*
- *Is making decisions ‘in the moment’ connected to a sense of intuition?*
- *How does my understanding of myself (as researcher) and my students (as participants) inform such decisions?*

In the following sections, we will outline the main themes that arose from our discursive puzzling, many of which operate at the nexus of teaching and research (Hanks, 2019; McKinley, 2019; Pinner & Sampson, 2021). Rather than a thematic analysis, we are taking a more novel approach here, reporting some excerpts from our

conversations verbatim. Excerpts were selected based on the themes that we narrowed down during the editing and writing process, which was also a discursive process.

INTUITION IN TEACHING AND RESEARCHING PRACTICE

We began our discussion by talking about what intuition actually is. Our conversation then moved onto ideas about co-creation and teacher-student synergy, or both being ‘on the same page.’ We then discussed the importance of feedback, for teachers and learners, moving on to issues affecting practitioner research and the way these two activities can and often do blur into the same endeavour.

Intuition and the Landscape of Decisions

Near the start of the first discussion, Richard attempted to validate the role of intuition in practice by linking it to the medical field (Greenhalgh, 2002; Iedema et al., 2013; Lieberman, 2000; Volland, 2007).

R: And actually in the medical profession, they rely on practitioner intuition more than you'd expect. And it's kind of a thing in the medical research.

J: Yes, because I guess intuition, it's the veil over the top, isn't it? But there's a wealth of in sometimes a lifetime of experience which all come together so that when you go to the doctor and you say, my glands are up, you know, I've got this or the other symptoms an experienced doctor can very quickly make a diagnosis, whereas an inexperienced doctor has to go and look it up.

R: Yes, that's right.

J: And teachers are obviously doing the same. I mean, I can see connections there, obviously, with exploratory practice, but also reflective practice, action research as well. It's all about becoming alert to what you already know because you've experienced it before.

In this way, we initially started out by confirming the importance of intuition, and understanding what we mean when we talk about it. It quickly became clear that for both of us, intuition was about making quick yet important

decisions that utilise our experience and knowledge to their fullest, without taking up too much cognitive energy or class time. This is an almost automatic process that happens whilst teaching, a sense of feeling our way through the myriad of decisions that we are making without stopping to think too much about them. This notion is described as ‘holistic perception’ (Gilpin & Clibbon, 2000, p. 124), and comes from research done into expert thinking and reactions which found that, whereas novices tended to focus on single problems and compartmentalised issues, experts could see a larger picture, which was hypothesised to free up working memory and allow them to arrive at a faster appraisal of the situation and make better judgements (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1988; Lesgold, 1988). Other studies have shown that overthinking something generally leads to poorer decisions (Leisti & Häkkinen, 2016; Thorsteinson & Withrow, 2009; Wilson & Schooler, 1991). We will return to this later when we discuss the dangers of too much reflection.

After swapping various medical stories (including Richard's near-death appendectomy and the nurse who intuitively saved his life), we moved on to discussing the fact that teachers are constantly making decisions in the classroom.

J: Yeah. So you're making hundreds and hundreds of tiny decisions all the time when you're in the classroom adjusting what you, you know, the pedagogy that you've been taught, which is, you know, you got to get people to talk, let's say, but also noticing people's emotional states, people's progression along a line of development as well. And I say that as if development is linear. Of course, we know it's not linear, it's kind of stops and starts and there's long periods where nothing apparently is happening. But actually, there's a lot going on beneath the surface. And if we were to, as you say, interrupt that, it would cause damage. Whereas with another person, they've kind of they've gone through all of that, and they now need somebody to say, No, no, stop, just rewind. Let's hear that again.

R: Right. And I'm working at a university now, but I miss those halcyon days teaching at a language school with smaller classes who I met five days a week. I had it in my head like, what the students' progress was. A mental gradebook of intuition almost... like, Erkan is doing really well. Yeah, but

his grammar is a mess and he he's, got loads of confidence, but he really needs a bit of correction. Whereas, you know, Kumiko for example, she has no confidence. Her grammar is almost perfect, but she needs confidence so no correction. And you have it all in your head like a little grade book of your students' progress. And I don't feel like I have that anymore.

This rapid decision making for teachers has been expressed by a variety of other authors (see also Sampson and Pinner, this issue). It is, as Allwright and Hanks (2009) put it, a form of understanding that is often too deep for words. Framing the process in complexity theory, Brown and Coles have noted that “[t]eachers are continuously making rapid, subtle decisions about how to respond to the dynamic, complex environment that classrooms constitute” (2000, p. 165). The authors go on to link this state of complex decision making with flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), a state of awareness and being in the moment that constitutes a highly motivated yet focused psychological state. This teaching in flow state is obviously a rewarding process, as flow is a motivational experience. We later add that teacher-research is also its own reward as it leads to professional development as well. For Brown and Coles, teachers develop a set of ‘purposes’ that allow them to maintain control within the complex unfurling of classroom interactions, which develop into ‘educated intuitions.’ They argue that these are further connected to Damasio’s (1996) ‘somatic markers’ (i.e., feelings and physiological emotional responses that are used to guide behaviour and which can facilitate learning). Brown and Coles make an interesting case that it is through being in the moment and attending to these ‘purposes’ whilst simultaneously feeling our way through to the best course of action with the ‘somatic markers’ that teachers stay on track and are able to navigate the landscape of classroom interactions dynamically and accurately. The emotional aspect of this landscape could also be referred to as the ‘emotional climate’ (Gkonou & Miller, 2020; see Sampson, this volume for further discussion) of the class. Gkonou and Miller (2020) argue that teachers need to be engaged with this emotional climate in order to attend to the needs of students and gauge what is happening in terms of their learning and understanding, which we later linked to a process of co-creation.

This also connects to the notion of doing being, a term coined by a participant in the Rio Exploratory Practice Group to describe being in the moment, and to highlight the important fact that we can never separate ‘what we do’ from ‘who we are’ (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 218). In her book, when explaining the processes of puzzling and EP, Judith took pains to show that the priority is not to do, but to “stop, look around, think” (Hanks, 2017, p. 274). A similar proviso might apply to defining intuition as well. The literature often expounds on the difficulties of setting out intuitions as a list or studying them objectively, because intuitions are developed over years of extended practice and experience, which Atkinson states needs to be further fine-tuned “many times with constant adjustment in the light of feedback” (2000, p. 70). Particularly with an endeavour as complex as teaching, this takes a long time and is primarily an internal, perhaps mostly subconscious process, and therefore also extremely personal. The act of teaching is also deeply personal, and many of those who become teachers do so because they are intrinsically motivated by a desire to teach and hold a passion for their subject (Dinham & Scott, 2000; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Richardson & Watt, 2006).

Here, not only is there a cognitive dimension but also an emotional aspect to feeling our way through a lesson. By recognising and paying attention to the emotional climate of our classrooms, we also invite personalisation, and for learners and teachers to share their identity (Henry & Thorsen, 2018; Ushioda, 2009). Ushioda has stated that “the notion of engaging our students’ identities is something many experienced language teachers have intuitively recognised as important” (2011b, p. 17). This statement was made in relation to student motivation, something we discussed at length and will return to presently. We talked about how we both rely on intuition to gauge the levels of motivation in our students, which can often cause us to make changes or alter the lesson on the fly if we feel things are not going well or could be improved, a kind of co-creation.

Co-Creation and Synergy

Motivation is not something that happens in isolation, and in our discussion, we found that concepts like motivation were part of a much larger and more dynamic picture. We had moved from a discussion about the type of classes we

both teach, when Judith asked Richard if he ever teaches large classes, and whether our intuitions about how the students are responding to the lesson are affected by the size of the class.

J: Again, that's a really interesting thing, isn't it? I was just thinking about, you know, teaching large groups. So I see with the undergraduates, I do one undergraduate module which has about 90 students in. And I mean, we do seminars as well, which are smaller groups, about 30 or so. But when you're lecturing or when you're giving a plenary, hopefully anyway, you are very aware of the people in the room and of the temperature of the room.

Judith then moved on to talking about playing music in a live setting as opposed to merely listening to a recording, and how it involves an interaction with the audience. This was likened to the act of lecturing in front of a large audience.

J: you can just play the music, but actually there is something magical happens when you have an audience. So it's the player or the players, the music and the interaction with the audience. And I think that something very, very similar that happens when we're teaching that we are playing our music, but we're also responding to the audience. And the audience has a say. Even if you're doing a kind of very traditional style of lecture, the response is... A good lecturer, I think picks up the responses of the audience and responds in turn and does things which they would find very hard to pinpoint what exactly they were doing. If you watch the video back, you might sort of say, okay, so I noticed you changed the pace here or I noticed you did something different here. Why was that? They might remember and sort of say, Well, I noticed that student was yawning or I noticed they were busy writing things down. So I thought, I better stop for a second. But actually, going back to the idea of intuition, there are intuitive moments during those lectures or talks that happen just as they do in a classroom.

So it's this co-creation between teacher and students where everybody is having a bit of agency in what happens in the classroom. Yeah, so I don't know if I'm over egging that.

R: No, I don't think so. I mean, when I wrote about motivational synergy, the importance of that relationship turned out to be really central, and in terms of motivation you know, autonomy and agency feature in so many theories. But I think that that concept of synergy actually might be bigger than just motivation.

Here, Richard was becoming aware that ideas from his previous inquiries were broadening and expanding to reach other areas of his practice, and both of us saw links from our experiences and our research interests as we came to recognise that teaching is not usually about one person in the 'teacher' role who simply passes on information like a record, an identical data packet for every class. Even in larger lectures, we co-create the understanding based on our interpretations of how we feel the students are responding to the lesson. In this way, the motivational synergy that Richard had examined for his PhD started to take on an even larger dimension and became a more general type of synergy between students and teachers, giving a great emphasis to context and the uniqueness of every classroom situation, even for experienced teachers.

This idea reminded us of complexity theory and ecological perspectives on language learning, which posit a more holistic approach to research that incorporates the many diverse influences that play a role in classroom interactions (Consoli, 2021; Tudor, 2003; van Lier, 2002). In particular, context has a very significant impact on the way any class might develop (Ushioda, 2015). At this juncture, we were reminded about the concepts that Kramsch (2002) had discussed when she put forward her enduring metaphor (inspired by Yeats' poem) in which she asks how we are able to recognise the dancer from the dance. Kramsch argues that, whilst undoubtedly two separate things, they are also inseparable from each other as both actor and action co-create each other. Is this the same for teaching? Surely, the act of teaching makes the teacher into what they are, and as a result the notion of context is extremely important. This context naturally includes the other people involved in the activity, most directly the students. Responding to context requires an aspect of being 'in the moment' and being aware or tuned in to those around us. Returning to the idea of musicians and live performances, when performers begin improvising or 'jamming,' they are playing their own instruments whilst being closely aware of what others are doing, yet ultimately nobody is certain of

what will happen next. This again quickly came back to teaching, and seemed to have many connections with concepts related to student-centredness, responsiveness and feedback, and even the notions that were advocated in Dogme ELT (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009). Dogme was originally a manifesto for film making that was pioneered in 1995 by Danish film directors Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg. Their approach was to combine aspects of scripted and unscripted interactions between actors and non-actors. It was an attempt to create authenticity via planning and improvisation. When applied to language teaching, the emphasis is on being able to respond to the needs of the learners in the moment, and to be able to dispense with the lesson plan based on how the teacher feels the students are responding in the moment.

The Dogme ELT movement was an attempt to de-emphasise the role of published textbooks and especially the role of technology, replacing that with a renewed focus on the interactions between students and teachers (McGrath, 2013). Ushioda (2011a) connected this approach to motivation due to its learner-centred and in-the-moment responsiveness because such an approach encourages the organic flow of learning and the bespoke co-creation of personally meaningful social interactions between students and teachers. It is likely that such an approach would not be easy for inexperienced or novice teachers, unless they had already built up confidence in their role, yet experienced teachers may well do such things intuitively, without even noticing sometimes.

R: And I think this is where that, as you say, sort of co-creation [...] if you're a good teacher, you will intuitively be able to make changes. It's part of those hundreds of decisions that you're making all the time.

Such an intuitive and adaptive approach to lessons would definitely require an awareness of what others are experiencing and the ability to respond accordingly, making feedback an essential component in this co-creative 'dance' between learners and teachers.

Feedback

One of the most recurrent themes in our discursive puzzling was how we were able to make assertions about the impact of classroom practices. As teachers, we may often talk about

students being 'bored' or 'demotivated' or having 'enjoyed' a particular activity. When we say that a class has gone well or badly, this is often based on a tacit feeling. Although it does happen, in our experience it is rare for students to tell us to our face that our lesson did not go well, yet even inexperienced teachers will be able to recognise whether a lesson was successful or well-received by the majority of the class. In one interesting project, Gkonou and Mercer (2017) looked at the development of emotional intelligence in language teachers, noting that it increased with experience. As we discussed this issue more, we came to appreciate that these tacit appraisals of the lesson, and of our students' progress more generally, were not based on nothing. They are developed over time utilising a variety of different types of feedback. It is well-established that not all types of feedback are equal, and of course feedback is only useful when it is accurate, constructive, or acted upon accordingly, although even wrongheaded feedback can be productive in showing a teacher what their students don't understand about teaching/learning. Whilst acknowledging that not all feedback is equal, or even beneficial to performance, Hattie (2008) in his famous synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses found that feedback was one of the top ten influences on student achievement.

Feedback comes in myriad forms, and its importance to education is established beyond refute (Allen & Katayama, 2016; Hattie, 2012b; see also Sutton et al., 2012 for further expansion). Just as making mistakes is essential to learning and improvement, feedback is "critical to raising achievement" (Hattie, 2012a, p. 157). In our talks, we discussed how we as teachers might respond to feedback from our students, and how this might inform our intuitive decision making.

R: And I think this is how you hone your senses as well, like by getting feedback and responding to it. I'm always really fascinated by any detailed feedback that I get from students.

J: Yeah, I want the feedback. I know some people they kind of dread it, but I actually want to know what they've been thinking.

Previously, both of us have advocated the importance of feedback between learners and teachers. Just as learners require feedback to develop their skills and expertise as learners and subject experts, it is essential that teachers receive feedback on their teaching so as to be able to adapt

and improve the delivery of their lessons (Hanks, 2022). Additionally, feedback was identified as one of the most important components in forging a reciprocal and sustainable link between the motivation of teachers and students, aka motivational synergy (Pinner, 2019).

Whilst much has been written on teacher to student feedback, the role of student to teacher feedback is less well established. In our discursive puzzling, we recognised that feedback for teachers is much more varied than the end of course evaluation that institutions often require of students, or the anonymous comments that we might receive at the end of the semester.

J: The big mistake is, though, I think the institutional mistake is that they tend to ask for feedback at the end of the course when it's too late to do anything.

R: Yeah.

J: I want it. I want it kind of regularly.

R: Yes. And I think we do get, like, there's different types of feedback out there. So just smiling or laughing at your rubbish jokes or whatever.

J: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Or sort of, busily writing things down.

R: Yeah, people coming up to you after the lesson and [...] It does happen occasionally when we finish a class for the semester. Some students want to take a photo with me. I always think that's a sign that they liked me. But I do worry that, you know, perhaps I'm too soft as a teacher and I prioritize being a likable, personable person rather than like, you know, a teacher who gets them, gets them to learn specific things or whatever.

J: And again, it's a balance, isn't it? It's trying to find a way to balance being the person that you believe in and that you believe you want to be.

R: Yeah.

J: And also sort of yeah, occasionally you do have to be kind of cruel to be kind and or, you know.

Judith then remembered a student named Iago from Pinner (2014), and the fact that not only positive but negative or problematic experiences can also provide good

learning opportunities. This was a good link to the crossover between our teaching experiences and our research output.

As we discussed the importance of feedback, we came to realise that what we meant by the word had a great deal of semantic crossover with data and empirical evidence. Just as feedback is imperative in teaching to avoid repeating mistakes or arriving at misunderstandings, evidence (as a form of feedback) is also the bedrock of what makes teacher-research so powerful in its ability to provide transformative insights into the best classroom practices.

Although most of our discussion was directly related to our teaching practice, the very fact that we are both teacher-researchers with an interest in EP meant that much of the discussion traversed both teaching and research. As discussed in the editorial to this special issue, there is an accepted dilemma that, counter-intuitively, being too reflective can potentially impair intuition. In extremes of self-consciousness, ruminating too much can be 'deleterious' and even lead to 'paralysis' (Claxton, 2000, p. 35). Richard encountered this problem directly when doing his PhD and found that he entered a state of 'hyper-reflexivity,' which led to several misunderstandings or communicative failures in the classroom (Pinner, 2019). This then informed his decision to reduce lesson planning and attempt a more intuitive or responsive approach to teaching, much resembling the Dogme ELT method described previously. Another parallel might be to what van Lier (1996) referred to as balanced teaching, comprised of "both planned and improvised elements" (p. 200). Li (2006) developed van Lier's idea into the area of research as well, recommending that researching is much like teaching as it does not always conform to a single set of rules, and best laid plans often go astray. In balanced research, Li acknowledges the essential role of intuition when a researcher makes decisions in the moment as events take place. Research is often about following new leads, being open to new theories and keeping an open mind. Again, when examining the importance of the role of intuition, the distinctions between teaching and research fade and the two activities often become one, much like the dancer and the dance (Kramsch, 2002).

Teaching and Research as its own Reward

As we moved our discursive puzzling towards research, we identified a theme that struck us as very important. Namely that what we sometimes call ‘practitioner research’ could just as easily be called ‘learning how to teach.’ In this way, the research is its own reward, because teaching is transformed back into learning in a self-sustaining cycle of development for both teacher and learners.

R: And I sort of thought like what would be interesting for our paper would also be to focus on that intersection of practice and research. You know, so sometimes you’re doing a research project and it all goes wrong and it’s not going to plan, but that’s actually going better than if it was going to plan because these amazing things are happening and you know, you’re trying to sort of, uh, gather the data as it is rather than as you want it to be. And I think that’s an intuitive process.

J: Mmmmm Yeeees, Yes, I think that’s very true.

R: So it doesn’t really matter what I’m teaching at the time. I can still, you know, it all fits under that umbrella [of practitioner research]. Yeah, there’s an aspect of responding to our students isn’t there sort of like that.

J: I think that’s also a of a two-way thing, isn’t it? And I think that’s another element of exploratory practice that I really enjoy is that principle about mutual development. So it’s not just me teaching others. You know what keeps me excited, what keeps me interested is that I’m also learning at the same time as teaching and at the same time as researching. So I’m sort of doing all of those things, keeping all those things in play at the same time.

R: Yeah. And if you’ve got a job that allows you to do that, then I think you’re very lucky, really.

So I’s sort of self rewarding, isn’t it. I think you know, that’s at the heart of my philosophy of

teaching really is that if I felt like I was the “know-it-all” and I have nothing left to learn, and if I ever felt that I couldn’t learn anything off my students, I would have to quit tomorrow.

J: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

As this longer extract shows, for both of us, teaching and research are not separate endeavours but rather different aspects of the same endeavour. In what we hope is not too clichéd a statement, we have established that one of the rewards of practitioner research is that it helps transform teaching back into learning, thus making it a sustainable form of professional development which should benefit both students and teachers. Also, the process of teaching is intrinsically rewarding, reminding us of the motivational Flow state that occurs when we allow our intuitions to guide us through a lesson and reach a positive outcome.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have explored a discursive approach to developing an understanding of the role of intuition in teaching and practitioner research. Our discussion led us down many interesting avenues, from the role of decisions in the classroom and the way knowledge is constructed, the nature of the relationship between students and teachers and the way intuition helps the teaching process turn into one of co-creation, and the importance of feedback in ensuring intuition develops through empirical evidence and experience rather than untested assumptions or vague and fuzzy notions about what is working. A truly intuitive practitioner will strive to deepen and develop their understandings and, we hope, this constant learning cycle involves not only learners but also (perhaps even especially) teachers in a process of continual development.

Authors’ Contributions

Richard S. Pinner and Judith Hanks conceived of the design of the study, collected the data, analyzed and interpreted the data, drafted and revised the article, and approved the final version of the article to be published.

Ethics Approval & Consent to Participate

This paper reports on a discursive exploratory study and all presented data are from the authors themselves – therefore consent is implicit.

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